

The Ocean Transportation Industry and the Right Whale

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Environmentalists, scientists, government regulators, and commercial operators can agree that the problems with protecting the Northern Right Whales are tremendously complex. As my friend Scott Krauss (of the New England Aquarium) said, "There is no silver bullet here." In fact, there is no clear-cut action that will allow us to even begin to solve the Northern Right Whale issue. There is no question of the dedication of the groups of people involved in trying to save the Northern Right Whale; in fact, the efforts of all the different groups, such as the New England Aquarium, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Coast Guard, Center for Coastal Studies, International Fund for Animal Welfare, various port authorities, the fishing industry, and the ocean transportation industry, is inspiring.

Putting the numbers in perspective, what are we really trying to do here? We are trying to reduce roughly two deaths to Northern Right Whales by human hands per year to either one or none. When you consider that there are hundreds of thousands of commercial vessel transits on our coast during the year, and certainly millions if you include fishing vessels and pleasure craft, and add in thousands upon thousands of miles of fishing gear, you can see how we are trying to reduce the odds.

Today, what can we say for a fact will work to prevent possible ship collisions with Northern Right Whales? Educating the mariner is a proven commodity. The increased knowledge in the last five years of mariners sailing on our coast is significant. The word is spread by vessel operators, pilots, shipping lines, the National Marine Fisheries Service, vessel agents, maritime academies, and others, all with enthusiasm and pride. I receive feedback from our vessels' Masters on a regular basis about the whales—they are engaged and serious about the issue, something they would not ever have even thought about five years ago. We in the maritime community should ensure a required

curriculum is presented to the International Maritime Organization for any new mariner licenses or the renewal of licenses to make mariners more aware of vessel interactions with all mammals and endangered species—it must begin in the classroom for the next generation of mariners.

Ship routing around known congregations of whales, or areas where whales are known to historically gather, is a solution that should be supported. Ship routing, however, must take into consideration that the vessel cannot be placed into a navigational hazard by re-routing and that the success of any re-routing program would require increased monitoring of the whales and the proper distribution of the whales' locations to the mariner.

There are those who believe rigid speed restrictions are necessary to prevent collisions. Those of us in the maritime community are united in our belief that speed restrictions are not a viable solution. In addition to the legality of speed restrictions under international law and the necessity of vessels to operate at safe speeds predicated on the relevant circumstances and conditions under which each individual vessel operates, there is a large economic impact for delayed vessel calling at ports in New England.

New England is lucky or unlucky depending on your perspective. In New England we get to share in the three largest congregation areas for Northern Right Whales: Cape Cod Bay, the Great South Channel, and the Bay of Fundy. What is also unique to New England is its large tidal range. The tidal range is important because most deep-water vessels are required to dock on high tide and in some cases daylight high tide. The effects of losing even one hour could result in a 12- or 24-hour delay and the costs are significant. The cost of a fully laden Liquid Natural Gas tanker can be in the area of \$70,000 per day—so a 12 or 24 hour delay could cost the charterer \$35,000-\$70,000.

Global containerization is predicated on a fixed, daily schedule. Just-in-time shipping (i.e., the weekly, or sometimes daily deliveries of stock to warehouses) is increasingly becoming the way manufacturers do business. Multimodes of transportation—air, sea, truck, and rail are all competing for cargo; significant delays and added costs can and will divert cargo from one mode of transportation to the other and from one port to another. For all these reasons and more, blanket speed restrictions are not a solution that works for the immediate recovery of the Northern Right Whale.

What can we expect going forward? Absent a technological solution that allows mariners to know where the whales are or a device that warns the whales of a coming vessel, will we ever have consensus? I doubt that we will ever have consensus on speed restrictions, routing, or outright banning of vessels, but I do believe we can all agree that education is a good place to start and more energy/dollars need to be invested in a technological solution.

From the beginning, those of us in the maritime community have been openly involved in this issue. We need to continue to do so and it is imperative that we as the ocean transportation industry—whether it be deep sea vessels, tug & barge units, passenger vessels, or fishing vessels—recognize that reducing the potential of vessels striking Northern Right Whales is essential to the survival of this species. We as an industry must recognize the value these beautiful creatures, as well as all marine animals, provide our fragile ocean systems and as stakeholders we must share these resources responsibly. The work has just begun. The people who work on the water are not ones to quit, the ocean is our home, and I can assure you we will continue to cooperate in saving this great whale.

